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Cover picture: Antarctica - what effect global warming?



Editorial

THERE IS HARDLY a day goes by without some publicity being given to 'green issues' - or in other words addressing the way we are polluting the planet we live on, through the production of 'greenhouse gases' (mainly carbon dioxide or CO₂) . Over the last 15 years two so-called 'Earth Summits' have been held, the first in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil and the second in Johannesburg, South Africa. World leaders have met and pledged to do something in order to try and deal with this problem.

More recently the report produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, charts the impact of temperature rises over the past 30 years and calculates the impact of this trend – if unchecked, with threats of major coastal flooding in low lying areas, increasing water shortages, famine and the extinction of many species of wildlife.

'Global warming' is a phrase used in the media to describe the effects of CO₂ emissions on our atmosphere. A recent article in a UK national newspaper was entitled '*World finally agrees that global warming threatens everyone*' (*Daily Telegraph* 7 April 2007). The question is - will all the well meaning words spoken by scientists and politicians have any effect? Will anyone do anything to solve the problem?

The 'Green' organisations and others say that the conferences produce very little action anyway! The accusation is that since the first 'Earth Summit', the situation has got worse! Despite the well-meaning intentions of these people, the Bible tells us that '*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*' [Jeremiah 10.23]. To use a modern

paraphrase of Jeremiah's words '*it is not within the power of man to map his life and plan his course*' [Living Bible], for ultimately the outcome of everything to do with this planet is in God's hands.

The richest nation in the world - the U.S.A., has refused to sign up to targets considered necessary to cut down the pollution from our homes, cars and factories. On top of this we have fast developing industrial countries like China and India who are not particularly interested in new approaches to industry and anti-pollution measures. They want to copy the wealthy nations and rapidly increase the wealth and prosperity of their peoples; while the already prosperous nations are reluctant to alter their industrial output that may result in the loss of jobs for many people and the loss political votes!

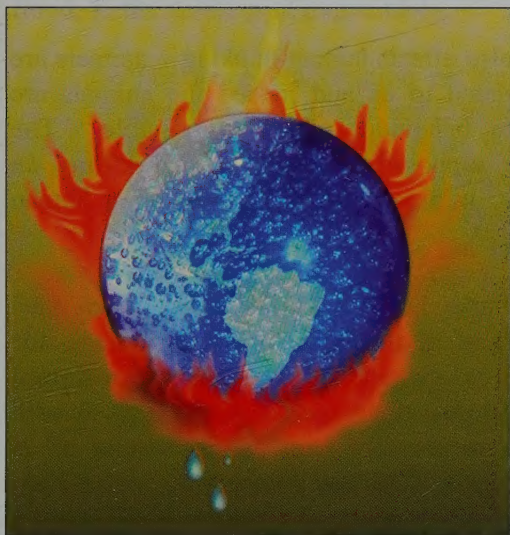
So if man cannot do it - who will? The Bible tells us that God has a plan to intervene. He will send Jesus again, who will '*destroy those who destroy the earth*' [Revelation 11.18]. Jesus will return as promised, to set up God's kingdom [Revelation 11.15]. Then the earth will be filled with God's glory through the restorative work of Jesus [Acts 3.20, 21]. The kingdom of God is the subject of an article in this issue (see page 13).

The present order of things will then pass away and there will be no need for 'Earth Summits' to talk about these problems. The administration of the world wide government of the kingdom of God will be with divine power as foretold by the prophet Isaiah: '*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD...with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth*' [Isaiah 11.2-4]. The threat of global warming will be over for '*all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*' [Numbers 14.21].

The first article in this issue deals specifically with today's environmental issues in more depth and the solution as foretold in God's Word the Bible. We urge our readers to place your trust in God, not in the empty promises of men!

Signs of the Times

Our changing environment



THERE IS GREAT concern at the moment about changes in world weather patterns and the long-term effects of climate change as the result of global warming. We are therefore encouraged and indeed made to be more environmentally conscious.

New houses in England have to be something like six times more energy efficient than they were twenty years ago. People are encouraged to re-cycle much of their household waste. In many schools children are taught about the 'good' people who look after the planet and the 'bad' people who pollute it.

This extends further – books and films about wildlife have never been so popular and whereas in the past the animals would have been subjects of a film, now they are the stars - the film is about the life of the animal. Humans beings are often portrayed as the 'bad-guys', destroying natural habitats and thus reducing the numbers of such animals.

‘ANIMAL RIGHTS’

Being ‘green’ is seen to be taking the moral high ground. Vegetarianism on purely moral grounds has never been more popular. So-called ‘Animal Rights’ activists lobby politicians and some extremists even take more direct action against farms which breed animals for use in medical testing. Fear is a great weapon in this campaign – man is harming the planet and if we don’t act now then it will be too late. Even when we do change our habits, it’s never enough to effect the changes needed.

The theory of Evolution also affects human thinking – animals are portrayed as being closely related to us and indeed the animals are shown to display human-like behaviour wherever possible. The unspoken conclusion we are supposed to reach is that killing an animal, for example a gorilla, is almost as bad as killing a human being.

Much of this thinking harks back to earlier times when men elevated animals to the status of gods. The American Indians, the Aborigines, the Celts and even the ancient Egyptians worshipped animals. What we are seeing today is not so far removed from such ancient waywardness. There are dangers with getting caught up in such thinking. So let’s put things in a Biblical perspective.

GOD – THE CREATOR

Firstly the planet is not our own - it belongs to God. Despite all the technological achievements of the last 150 years, mankind has seriously damaged the earth’s atmosphere and according to some scientists this damage is threatening the very existence of life on the planet. Human progress has failed to acknowledge God as the Creator of all life.

Secondly, man has been entrusted with the care of the planet and he has been given authority over the animals:

‘You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen - even the beasts of the field, The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas’ [*Psalm 8. 6-8*].

We are not equal with the animals - we ‘*have dominion over*’ them. Let’s have a look at a statement made by the Apostle Paul. This is a chronicle of man’s decline from true worship after the time of the flood, to the worship of pagan idols.

‘For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.’

[*Romans 1.20 -23*]

So, men and women originally ‘*knew God*’. The first mistake was to deny Him the glory that is His right; they did not glorify Him as God. They then followed their own foolish human wisdom and their hearts were darkened. And so they made images, statues and idols. Paul describes the people who did this; ‘*who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever*’ [*Romans 1.25*].

GOD’S GIFT TO MANKIND

In our love for animals (and there is nothing wrong in having an active interest in animals), we must never lose sight of the fact that they are evidence of the glory and wisdom of God. The world is too

focused on the 'creature' and has entirely lost sight of the 'Creator'. God in His wisdom has given us the fruits of the planet to enjoy. We need not feel guilty about enjoying a reasonable share of the earth's abundance, for it is God's gift to mankind, as we learn from the first book of the Bible:

'Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.' And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'

[Genesis 1.26-29]

In this passage we also see the single biggest difference between ourselves and the rest of God's creation. Unlike every other animal, we have been created in the image of God. We, more than any other living beings, exhibit the hallmark of our Creator. We bear similarities with the animals because we are the work of the same Designer but to associate ourselves too closely with the animals is to de-base the image of God which we bear.

'A DUTY OF CARE'

Although mankind has been given authority over the rest of God's Creation, this brings with it a great responsibility. We have 'a duty of care' -to look after this wonderful planet and not seek to destroy our

environment. Indeed the very first occupation was appropriately that of a gardener.

‘Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it’[*Genesis 2.15*].

Remember, this was before man had introduced sin into the earth. The curse of ‘*thorns and thistles*’, making the job of tending God’s Creation such hard work, had not yet been pronounced. So man’s very first role was to exercise control over the growing plants and flowers within the garden. We can imagine Adam pruning the plants which were there and arranging them to enhance their beauty and usefulness.

THE FIRST ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE

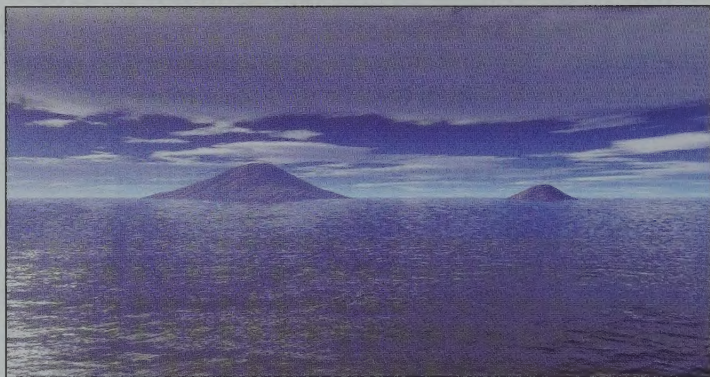
But environmental catastrophe is nothing new. Adam’s sin brought about the biggest change the earth has ever seen. Death became a reality. Adam was removed from the garden and had to work hard from that time onwards for his day to day survival. The ‘*thorns and thistles*’ just mentioned invaded the tender plants Adam had cultivated.

It was then in the goodness of God that He provided Adam and his wife with skins to cover their nakedness. Thus the death penalty was exacted, not immediately on Adam and his wife Eve, but on the animals which were sacrificed in their place. This act pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In providing animal sacrifices, God has given His sanction that man is able to kill the animals in order to keep himself alive. This authority was confirmed by Divine command in the Law of Moses given to the nation of Israel, so we need not worry about eating flesh. This also emphasizes the fact that, as far as God is concerned, human life is of far greater importance than the life of the rest of His Creation. The animals under the Law of Moses were killed instead of man.

THE GREAT FLOOD

After Adam and Eve, the next great event signalled a major irreversible shift in the climate of the planet, one which makes current talk of climate change look like 'a storm in a tea cup'. The great flood brought an end to the morning mists which had watered the earth and introduced rain for the first time. It also brought to an end the antediluvian civilization - mankind was all but wiped out by the power of the elements used by God.



*'The waters prevailed...and the mountains were covered
and all flesh died that moved on the earth' [Genesis 7.20,21]*

Ever since that time, God has used extreme weather conditions to further His plan for the world. The Bible tells us about some of these catastrophic events:

- Famine during the time of Joseph (Genesis chapter 43)
- The plagues on Egypt (Exodus chapters 7-12)
- Famine during the time of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1.1)
- Drought in the time of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17)
- Earthquake in the time of Uzziah (Amos 1.1; Zechariah 14.5)

Conversely God has given good weather, exceptionally good weather when His purpose requires it - the seven years of plenty during the time of Joseph and also times of plenty during the reign of King

Solomon. That's five examples in Scripture, of God changing the weather to bring about drought or famine or other extremely adverse weather conditions and two examples of God controlling the weather for the benefit of mankind. The fact that God is able to control the weather and use it to further His purpose is confirmed in the Psalms:

‘Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all the depths; fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling his word.’

[Psalm 148. 7]

ARE WE HEADING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER?

So what about our times? Are the changes in the climate that every one else is so worried about, actually part of God's plan for the world. Is God actually engineering changes in the climate? Jesus foretold times of great environmental change in these words:

‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ‘And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven’ *[Luke 21. 10]*.



The effects of global warming?

Within the last decade or so, major famines have occurred in Ethiopia, Sudan and in North Korea with lesser famines affecting many other countries in Africa and elsewhere. Many world disasters are made far worse by man himself, but climate change is undeniably a factor in most of the famines of recent times.

So this suggests very strongly that the famines resulting from climate change are a 'sign of the times' - a sign that Jesus will soon return to the earth. Therefore the things that are a source of great concern to many people, should be a source of great joy to believers.

If the worst prophets of environmental doom are correct, then man has already done irreversible damage to the climate and the planet is facing an increasing threat of environmental catastrophe to a point where (and some predict this by the end of the 21st century) human life will only be possible for a comparative handful of individuals around the polar regions because everywhere else will be too hot and arid.

GOD WILL INTERVENE

Does that worry you? Or does it excite you, because the Bible tells us that God will not let things go that far? In a sense the worse the climate gets, the nearer we know we will be to the return of Jesus.

So should we be environmentally irresponsible because this will speed the return of Jesus? Should we consume as much energy and produce as much CO₂ as possible? No, because the earth is not ours, we have this duty of care to protect the planet that God has given to mankind, at least the bit of the planet that we have responsibility over. And we most certainly should not try and force God's hand. God will send Jesus back when He is ready to do so. That day is set in the Divine plan so Jesus' followers don't have to worry, however bad things get or are said to become.

As far as permanent damage is concerned, we can remember that although man is in charge of the earth, he is not controlling it, for God is in total control. God will not let man do anything that will mar His plan of salvation for this earth.

A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Ultimately the climate problems affecting the planet will not be resolved until Jesus Christ returns to the earth. The planet will then see its next great climate change. But this time the climate will not get worse, but quite the opposite, the earth will spring into bloom. This rather suggests that, given the complex nature of climate change there is something that the scientists have so far missed, but time will tell. What we certainly do know is that life in the Kingdom of God will be better in every respect, climate included. The prophet Isaiah sums it up in these words:

‘For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
and the former shall not be remembered or come to
mind’ [*Isaiah 65.17*].

Now think about the following words of the Old Testament prophets – some of the many word pictures contained in the Scriptures concerning the great environmental changes to occur on the ‘*new earth*’ that God will create.

‘The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing...For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, there shall be grass with reeds and rushes’ [*Isaiah 35.1, 2, 7*].

‘For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody’ [Isaiah 51.3].

‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, And all the hills shall flow with it’ [Amos 9.13].

Yes, we do have every reason to look forward. We know that the climate is going to change for the better at some future time, when Jesus is here and the faithful will have the privilege of assisting him in establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. The Apostle Peter reminded his readers that *‘we, according to his (God’s) promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’* [2 Peter 3.13].

Human life is subject to sin, disease and ultimately death. Unlike the rest of mankind, lovers of God have always acknowledged this fact. Unlike the others they know that there is nothing man of himself can do about it. However God in his love has already acted in providing His wonderful Son, Jesus, as a covering for sin. And because of this the followers of Jesus can look forward to a changed environment in a world which will become in every sense a better place.

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Bible Teaching about...

The Kingdom of God

FOR A LONG time it has been assumed by many, that man is at the helm of his own destiny and that given time, he will eventually be able to stabilize global relationships to the lasting satisfaction of everyone concerned.

The record of his progress in achieving this desired 'peace on earth' has, thus far, been disappointing. Much evil, violence and blood-shed have repeatedly scarred the fields of endeavour where man's lust for power and wealth have struggled to survive in the midst of open conflict. Even now, the outlook for the future becomes a darkened hope as more sophisticated weapons increase the possibility of global mass destruction.

GOD RULES IN THE KINGDOMS OF MEN

For these reasons it might be difficult, at first, to accept the declared fact that '*The Most High (God) rules in the kingdoms of men*' [Daniel 4.17, 32]. He has allowed men to rise to positions of great power where they have figured prominently in the ever - shifting political landscape of the world. Seen from an impartial perspective, this unfolding history leads to the irresistible conclusion that God's controlling Hand is slowly but surely guiding all things to an announced predetermined end.

It is as if God has said, 'If mankind persists in the belief that they can successfully rule themselves - if they choose to pursue the unbridled gratifications that are pleasing to the flesh - if they will have none of My ways, and are uninterested in the blessings of My

Kingdom, then they must accept the consequences of their own folly and reap a rich harvest of social chaos. They will suffer from the violence and moral decadence which will escalate to their own destruction. But My plan and purpose with this earth will remain unchanged. It will eventually prosper until the earth is at last, filled with My glory!' (See God's words to Moses in Numbers 14.21)

It must be remembered that all that has happened in the past, and what is taking place at the present time, is intended to bring **about this Kingdom of God upon earth** in which there will be '*Glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace goodwill toward men*' [Luke 2. 14] - a time when 'God's will shall be done on earth as it is now done in heaven.' (See the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6.10). This is what God has promised. From the very beginning He has made known His intention to heal the breach caused by Adam's sin [Romans 1.16; 1 Corinthians 15.22].

He has offered an opportunity for all who have the wisdom to believe that He will do exactly what He has said He will do, and who are willing to expend the effort to become the kind of people we should be as His Word influences our thoughts and actions. It is a gracious invitation to become a part of something very wonderful.

IT ALL STARTS WITH ABRAHAM

It might be helpful as we attempt to understand this coming Kingdom, to look at its unique beginning. It all began when God made certain promises to Abraham, a faithful man who lived about 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ (See Genesis 12.1-3). He was promised that '*in you all families of the earth shall be blessed*'. The Apostle Paul uses this promise to define the 'Gospel' - the good news of a coming Kingdom [Galatians. 3.8, 9].

The descendants of Abraham soon found themselves in the land of Egypt where they had fled from a severe famine in the land of Canaan [Genesis 42.1, 2]. They prospered and increased in numbers, so much so that the Egyptians were concerned that should a hostile invasion

occur, they might join forces with the invaders and so destroy their nation [Exodus 1.9,10]. A systematic persecution began with devastating consequences. Moses came on the scene and in due time became a powerful leader. Following God's instructions, a series of powerful plagues brought ruin to Egypt and set the stage for a mighty deliverance. Approximately two million Israelites - men, women and children stood on the shores of the Red Sea, while the Egyptian forces, who sought to destroy them, were drowned [Exodus 14.28-31].

Thus a new Kingdom was formed. God was their King. When a covenant was offered for them to become God's chosen people, they with one voice declared, '*All that the LORD has said, we will do*' [Exodus 19.8]. Despite the unprecedented demonstrations of God's power, and the irrefutable evidence of His protective care, these Israelites, had great difficulty demonstrating a faith and confidence in an admittedly difficult situation, which would enable them to obey the Laws and Commandments that had been given to them.

It is important to note that upon their agreement to obey His voice and keep His Covenant, God was prepared to give them the status of a Kingdom, by giving them all the recognized components which were necessary for its constitution. There would be a territory - after all they were returning to the land promised to their ancestral fathers, and of which they were the rightful heirs. God had declared: '*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*' [Exodus 20.2]

They would have a Constitution. This would be necessary to create, define, and establish a structured unanimity as the state began to function. There would be Laws, both civil and ecclesiastical, to regulate all aspects of life. Co-rulers would have the authority to establish and maintain law and order. They would share the power and authority of the King and would administer the affairs of the Kingdom. The subjects of the Kingdom would be the inhabitants who would live under the authority and protection of the King. Each person would have rights, privileges, and obligations. The Kingdom would have

direction and purpose, and this would be reflected in the general ambitions and attitudes of all the people.

A DISASTROUS START

The first opportunity to enter and occupy the Land promised to them ended in disaster. For 40 days a small group of men surveyed the Land. It was truly as God had said to Moses '*a land flowing with milk and honey*' [Exodus 3.8], but there were also giant warriors in the land. This filled the hearts of the Israelites with fear. They just could not believe that the God who had done such mighty acts on their behalf and had brought them safely out of Egypt, could also defeat the nations which God had commanded them to drive out of the land. They longed to return to Egypt. (See Numbers Chapters 13 and 14) A long journey through a howling wilderness for 40 years would readjust their thinking and they assembled once more on the border of their inheritance across from the city of Jericho, under the leadership of Joshua [Deuteronomy 31.7-9].

Initially they did fairly well, but after the death of Joshua, they turned to the idol worship of the nations they should have driven out as they took possession of the Land [Judges 2.7, 8]. This tragic mistake brought long periods of bondage and servitude. Many times it took years for them to recognize their mistake, and when they did, God sent a leader who would deliver them from the cruel hand of oppression. But the lesson was never learned. Soon after they were delivered from one oppressor, back they would go to idol worship, and again into the oppression of the people whose idol they worshipped, instead of the God who brought them out of the Land of Egypt.

A bright spot occurred during the reigns of King David and his son Solomon, but as continuous spiritual deterioration became evident during the reigns of successive kings, the situation got so bad that God allowed first the Assyrians and then the Babylonians to conquer His people and destroy the city of Jerusalem. Survivors were taken away into exile and slavery.

Seventy years would pass before they were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Another 400 years would pass before Jesus stood in their midst. He condemned their evil ways and incurred their hatred. Despite his good deeds, they did not rest until they had killed him. Forty years later the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem. Large numbers died in the siege and those who did survive were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

ISRAEL BECOMES A STATE

For two thousand years the Jews have suffered. It is only of a comparatively recent date that efforts to establish a homeland for the Jews began to take shape, and in 1948 Israel became a State. It has been a hard difficult work with many formidable obstacles to surmount. Their success can only be attributed to the guiding and protective hand of God. He had promised through His prophets, that in the latter days His people would be gathered back to their Land [*Ezekiel 11.16, 17*].

It is important to note that Jesus began His ministry by preaching the Gospel (good news) of the Kingdom of God. This was the same Gospel which was preached to Abraham 1,900 years before Jesus was born. It had not changed, but the time had come for the King of this Kingdom to appear among His people. The story stretches over a period of 4000 years. It is a sad story of a privileged people and the difficulty they had in faithfully living up to their responsibilities.

THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

We can turn now, from this brief history of Israel, to consider their future. Obviously, God has not cast away His people [*Romans 11.1, 20*]. The work of making this world a better place in which to live will come through the final redemption of His people. Jesus said that '*salvation is of the Jews*' [*John 4.22*].

The nation of Israel has a future despite appearances to the contrary. God has declared through His prophets what would otherwise be nothing but a empty dream. He has promised a time when there

will be no more war, only one religion and one temple for worship, instant judgment and justice, no more poverty, and a plentiful supply of all the necessities of life. Most importantly, there will be universal education in the rules which will enable men to live at peace. There will be nothing to make us afraid.

There was a time, and that not so long ago, when it would have been difficult to read Paul's words recorded in his letter to the Romans chapter 11 and still believe the Jews had a future. Much less would it have been logical to suppose they would be successful in resettling their land to the extent that they could eventually have the recognized international right to call themselves '**The State of Israel**'.

Now, however, with the undeniable facts of recent events in front of us, things are quite the reverse. It is hard to read these words of Paul recorded in Romans, and not come to the conclusion that God has not only preserved them through the dreadful time of their dispersion, but that He has been fulfilling His promise to restore them once again to their land. Listen to the words of the Prophet Jeremiah:

For it shall come to pass in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them. Therefore do not fear, O my servant Jacob', says the LORD, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you, says the LORD, to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished'

[Jeremiah 30.8-11].

The prophet Micah also foretold this time of Israel's restoration and links it with the coming time of world-wide peace in the Kingdom of God:

'Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's House shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us his ways, and we shall walk in his paths' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken' [*Micah 4.1-4*].

A DARK DAY BEFORE THE DAWN

There will be a dark day for Israel before all this takes place. The prophet Ezekiel speaks about an invasion by hostile forces which will seem to achieve unprecedented success. This is the time when their promised Messiah will come to them, but he will have scars in his hands and his feet, and in His side [*Zechariah 12.10 and 13.6*]. In the midst of great mourning they will acknowledge the national rejection of their king [*Zechariah 12.11-14*]. In this humble confession, the great work of restoration will begin. The wonderful blessings in store for this troubled world will then spread out with healing and with hope.

Looking at this information for the first time, it may seem like some kind of a fairy-tale. But 4,000 years ago God made promises to

Abraham and with an oath, guaranteed its absolute fulfillment. It takes time and patience to put the whole picture together, but soon the established frame-work will be evident, and the details will become clear as we proceed. Once we can see past the systems which have strayed so far from what the Bible actually teaches, it becomes logical and rational to believe. Then we can live our lives in a sure hope that soon all the violence and rampant immorality of this present world will be no more, and there will be *'Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men.'* [Luke 2.14]

Clearly, God has not cast away His people, and we should be careful to note how Paul continues his argument:

'For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins' [Romans 11.25-27].

Jesus was born to be a King! The Kingdom of Israel will be restored, and Jesus will sit on the throne of his father David in Jerusalem [2 Samuel 7.12-16; Luke 1.32]. From that city, all the affairs of his government will be administered. This restoration of the Kingdom of Israel will be in faithfulness to the promises God made to Abraham. Then all nations of the earth will be blessed. This is the 'Good News' of the Kingdom of God. To believe it, and to live by the commandments of its King, is to live in the certain hope of being a part of these wonderful things God has in store for those who love and seek Him.

Tom Mitchell
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Parables of Jesus...

The Good Samaritan

THE OLD MAN was making his way home in the early evening when he was attacked, robbed of all he had and left for dead. The road he took was in an area notorious for such crimes. Most of the passers by would not or could not stop to help him. Then a foreigner saw his plight, stopped and did what he could for the victim, tearing up his own shirt to bandage the poor man's severe wounds. Then he dragged him to his car and took him to the hospital, urging them to do their best for him. Much later he would return and seek out the victim to ensure his complete recovery. The local newspaper report referred to this foreigner as 'The Good Samaritan', and most readers would understand what was meant.

WHO WAS THE GOOD SAMARITAN?

The name 'Good Samaritan' has passed into our language as a person who is compassionate and helpful, especially to those in adverse circumstances. The title derives from a parable of Jesus, recorded in the Gospel of Luke chapter 10. A Samaritan was a native or inhabitant of Samaria, a region west of the River Jordan in what is now Israel. These people had been placed in the land of Israel when the Northern Kingdom had been attacked by the Assyrians and the Jews were taken into captivity in other lands [*2 Kings 17.24*]. In the time of Jesus, Samaritans were not on speaking terms with the Jews [*John 4.9*].

The parables of Jesus were much more than simple stories used as illustrations and examples based on everyday life. They served to illustrate and explain divine principles. They were used by Jesus in his

teaching to express truths about God, man and the gospel of salvation. We need to relate this parable and many others to the teaching of Jesus and in particular to the Gospel (good news) of the coming kingdom of God. If we want to be a follower of Jesus, we need to understand the message of the parables, for in them we gain a greater understanding of what it really means to be a Christian.

Those who actually heard him were amazed, for the record in Matthew tells us that *'when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes'* [Matthew 7.28, 29].

BACKGROUND TO THE PARABLE

Some background information will help us to understand this parable, 2,000 years after it was told by Jesus living in Israel at a time when the land and its people were subject to the rule of Rome. Firstly, let's think about some of the characters in the story, and the geographic setting of the Parable.

The first character was a Lawyer, who was an expert in the religious teachings of the Mosaic Law. Then we read about a Priest and a Levite. Both were involved in the service of the Temple in Jerusalem, the priests offering the sacrifices required by the Law and they were assisted by the Levites in the Temple services. It has been estimated that there were about 12,000 priests and Levites at the time of Christ.

They lived in Jericho, some 18 miles from Jerusalem and to them the road between these two cities was a familiar and a dangerous route. Significantly the road from Jerusalem to Jericho drops 3,000 feet in 18 miles! In the time of Jesus there were no intervening towns or villages - probably just one inn, a resting place that took in all kinds of people.

Then why specifically did Jesus refer to *'a certain Samaritan'*?

The Samaritan was selected to show that he was a person from whom a Jew had no right to expect any help or relief because of the enmity which existed between these two separate peoples. The Samaritans were a race that had been 'excommunicated' by the Jews; a byword among them and synonymous with heretics.



The road from Jerusalem to Jericho

We also need to note why this parable was given. Here was one who, as a lawyer knew and understood the most important of God's commandments as set out in the Law given to Moses. He posed the question:

"Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"
 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered rightly; **do this** and you will live" [Luke 10.25-28].

'Do this'! The message of the parable is beginning to emerge, but there is a lot more. The lawyer wanted *'to justify himself'*!

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

These Jewish lawyers spent hours debating who should be classified as a neighbor and some concluded, contrary to the Law, that no Gentile (non-Jew) should ever be helped.

‘Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead”’ [Luke 10.30].

This was not an unusual experience on this road, as you can imagine. The priest and the Levite wanted to avoid contamination with blood and possibly a dead body which would make them unclean under the Law of Moses. But the Samaritan showed compassion on the injured traveller. He *‘went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him’* [Luke 10.34]. Note the extent of his actions !

- * He saw him;
- * He had compassion;
- * He went to him;
- * He bandaged his wounds;
- * He poured on oil & wine;
- * He set him on his own animal;
- * He walked alongside;
- * He brought him to the inn;
- * He took care of him;
- * When he departed, he gave two days wages to the innkeeper for his care;
- * He ordered continuing care;
- * He promised to pay whatever it cost for that care;
- * He promised to *‘come again;’*
- * He promised to repay any debt incurred.

You will see later how significant all these actions are. They are all **‘doing things’** and actions speak louder than words! The Samaritan was the unique and complete **saviour** of this man and in this we see a shadow of Jesus himself - the unique and complete **Saviour** of mankind.

Then Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer: *‘So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?’* Showing his prejudice in not naming the Samaritan, the man replied, *‘He who showed mercy on him’*.

Then from Jesus came the direct answer:

‘go and do likewise’ [Luke 10.37].

There were plenty of worthy actions that the Samaritan did - and this must be the primary message of this parable to all who would follow Jesus as true Christians. The second great commandment, correctly repeated by the enquiring lawyer was: *‘Love your neighbour as yourself’* [Luke 10.27].

But this parable was more than a good story with a moral lesson. All the parables were short, simple stories designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson. They contained figures of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences. The Greek word for parable literally means ‘a laying by the side of’ or ‘a casting alongside’; in other words a comparison or likeness.

INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES

Let’s remind ourselves of some words of Jesus about parables:

‘And the disciples came and said to him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to

know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given...But blessed are your eyes for they see and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” [Matthew 13.10,16,17].

Many people since have stopped here and used this parable to encourage others to show mercy and help to any in need. Indeed, ‘helping one’s neighbour’ is included in the beliefs and practices of many religious and social communities.

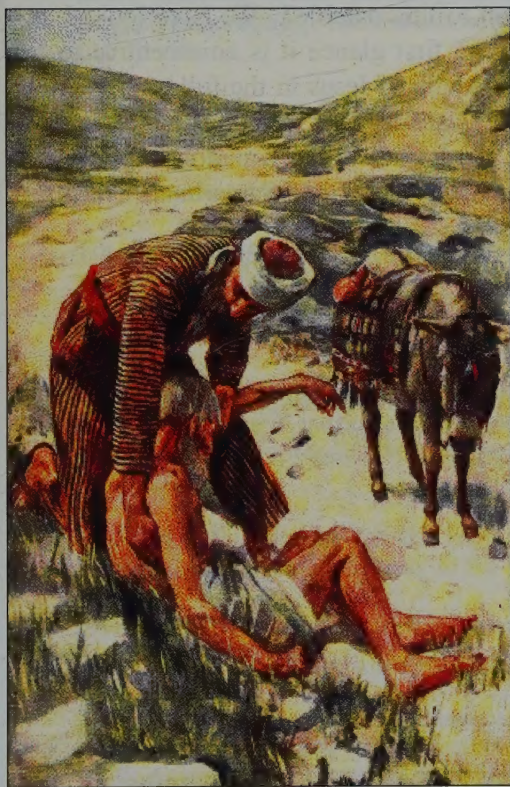
When Jesus first used parables he explained their meaning and interpretation. A clear example is the parable of the sower (see Luke chapter 8 verse 9 onwards) where the disciples requested a full interpretation. Later Jesus expected them to understand the meaning themselves. In fact, many of the parables must have gained for the disciples, a new meaning and insight into the Gospel message after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Again we make the point - we need to relate the parable to Jesus’ teaching and in particular to His proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom of God. From that time onwards, discerning men and women have seen in this parable of the Good Samaritan, a representation of man’s need and the sacrificial work of Christ in providing a way of escape from death. Remember the Lawyer’s question that prompted this parable: *‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’*

In this parable we find the answer in a wonderful parallel, the details of which emerge in the particulars that were chosen by Jesus to illustrate the underlying message of his preaching. All men are in effect going downhill from Jerusalem - the city of God and the city of blessing, to Jericho - the city of death. All have been robbed by sin, of life itself. The Law given to Moses represented by those who practiced it, the priests and Levites, could not bring life.

It needed **one** who was also going that same way! And Jesus was a mortal man, going down that steeply descending road that led towards death. The one who was rejected by the Jews, came to our aid, bringing *'life and immortality to light through the gospel,'* [2 Timothy 1.10]. It was **Jesus alone** who came and did everything for mankind!

'Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.' [Acts 4.12]



It was Jesus who paid the price of redemption – yes, even the two pennies were significant! It was Jesus who *'had compassion...and bandaged (our) wounds'*. We recall how he stood up in the synagogue on one occasion in his home town of Nazareth and read the prophetic words of Isaiah:

'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound' [Isaiah 61.1].

The good Samaritan

And, quite importantly, Jesus, like the Samaritan, promised to return and at that return to provide for any future needs and to give rewards. Jesus, in His life, death, resurrection and return is the **complete 'good Samaritan'**.

The parable and its counterpart fit together as we have come to see and expect in our Bible studies. Later the disciples would see the whole picture and realise what a wonderful teacher they had in Jesus.

YOUR RESPONSE

Now what is your reaction to this parable? We have looked at it in some detail. Certainly, even on first glance it is an incentive to **'do good'**. But if we would be a disciple of Jesus in the fullest sense, then we will not only come to appreciate its real meaning but we will be well on the Way that leads to eternal life in the Kingdom of God soon to be set up on earth at the return of 'The Good Samaritan'.

'And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' [*John 17.3*].

'He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"' [*Revelation 22.20*]

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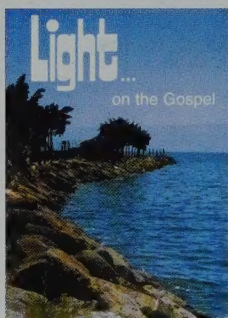
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